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From: Ludwigsen, Emily
Sent: Fri 8/7/2015 7:56:41 PM
Subject: News Clips: CO Mine Spill

Associated Press (via Journal Times)

http://journaltimes.com/news/us/orange-waste-from-colorado-mine-creeps-toward-new-mexico/article_be6f1b0c-c4a4-50b8-b6ca-1884b69aa540.html

New Mexico blasts EPA for late notice on Colorado mine spill

Dan Elliott and Colleen Slevin

August 7, 2:30

DENVER (AP) — Officials in New Mexico are blasting the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for not informing them soon enough about a plume of mustard-colored muck floating downstream from a Colorado mine.

New Mexico's environment secretary, Ryan Flynn, said Friday that the EPA downplayed the danger the contamination posed to wildlife, saying that potential harm can't be known until the contents of the wastewater and their concentrations are known.

The EPA didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The wastewater was accidentally released Wednesday by a cleanup team at the Gold King Mine in southwest Colorado. An estimated 1 million gallons of mine waste spilled into a creek that flows into the Animas River.

The EPA has said people should stay out of the river. Water utilities have closed intake valves to

protect their systems.

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Christian Science Monitor

<http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/2015/0807/Environmental-workers-spill-one-million-gallons-of-waste-into-Colorado-river>

Environmental workers spill one million gallons of waste into Colorado river

Kelsey Warner

August 7, 2015

A team working for the Environmental Protection Agency accidentally spilled one million gallons of acidic wastewater into a river while working on a waste-containment project at an abandoned mine north of Silverton, Colo., Wednesday.

The EPA's team was working with heavy equipment to establish a safe way to enter Gold King Mine and access contaminated water, said Richard Mylott, a spokesman for the EPA in Denver in an interview with The Durango Herald. The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metal pollution flowing out of the mine into Cement Creek, he said.

But that all went awry when a plug holding back the waste, which contains high levels of sediment and heavy metals, was accidentally released. The disaster dumped about one million gallons of acidic water, the EPA estimates, which flowed downstream as bright orange sludge through Cement Creek and into the Animas River, which is a tributary of the San Juan River, and popular among recreational boaters and fishermen.

La Plata County closed off the Animas River to the public for more than 70 miles, from San Juan County to New Mexico, and officials recommended that the water not be used for agricultural purposes until the water has been deemed safe. Officials in Utah are also monitoring the situation as the San Juan river's ultimate destination is Powell Lake, a reservoir along the border of Utah

and Arizona.

"Colorado Parks and Wildlife biologists are monitoring the impacts to the fish and other wildlife in the Animas River," Joe Lewendowski, Public Information Officer for Colorado Parks and Wildlife in Durango said.

The agency has placed cages with fish in the river to see how they react to the waters. Officials say they should know Friday whether there were any effects, according to The Denver Post.

San Juan County Emergency Manager Don Cooper emphasized that there is no cause for panic because the EPA has told the county that the spill will not harm humans, in an interview with a local newspaper, Daily Times. The primary pollutants are copper, iron, and zinc, according to officials.

"It's not going to look pretty, but it's not a killer," Mr. Cooper said.

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Daily Mail

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3187787/River-turned-yellow-blown-plug-causes-1-million-gallons-toxic-waste-leak-disused-mine.html>

Entire Colorado river turns YELLOW after one million gallons of waste leaks from disused gold mine - but authorities insist there's no danger

Christopher Brennan and Sam Matthew

August 7, 2015 2:10pm

A federal mine cleanup crew unleashed a million-gallon mine waste spill that sent a plume of orange-ish muck down a river in southwest Colorado on Thursday.

The US Environmental Protection Agency said that a cleanup team was working with heavy equipment Wednesday morning to secure an entrance to the Gold King Mine. Workers instead released an estimated 1 million gallons of mine waste into Cement Creek.

Contaminants coursed down the creek, which runs from around Silverton, Colorado, into the Animas River before flowing into the San Juan River in New Mexico and joining the Colorado River in Utah.

Officials say that the water, believed to now contain high amounts of iron and zinc, does not pose a threat to drinking water. However, fears remain that it may kill fish and other animals after the river's acidity increased 100-fold.

Officials say that the water, which now contains high amounts of iron and zinc, will not affect drinking water, but one test saw Above, Dan Bender, with the La Plata County Sheriff's Office, takes a water sample of the contaminated water

'The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metals pollution flowing out of the mine,' agency spokesman Rich Mylott said in a statement.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said a cleanup team was working with heavy equipment to secure an entrance to the Gold King Mine in southwest Colorado on Wednesday.

Officials emphasized that there was no threat to drinking water from the spill. But downstream water agencies were warned to avoid Animas water until the plume passes, said David Ostrander, director of EPA's emergency response program in Denver.

Some have speculated that although local cities mostly pull from the Florida River, the inability to pull from the Animas would lead to water use restrictions.

Officials weren't sure how long it would take the plume to dissipate, Ostrander said.

The acidic sludge is made of heavy metal and soil, which could irritate the skin, he said.

The EPA was testing the plume to see which metals were released. Previous contamination from the mine sent iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc and copper into the water, said Peter Butler, co-coordinator of the Animas River Stakeholders Group.

Contaminants have made the water more acidic, with a pH drop from 7.8 to 5.8, according to tests from Colorado Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety scientist Kirstin Brown.

A neutral pH is 7 and each whole number below representing a tenfold increase in acidity, meaning that the Animas has become 100 times more acidic.

Earlier Thursday, the EPA said in a statement that the polluted water 'was held behind unconsolidated debris near an abandoned mine portal.'

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EcoWatch

<http://ecowatch.com/2015/08/07/mine-waste-spill-colorado/>

1 Million Gallons of Mine Waste Turns River in Colorado Orange

Lorraine Chow

August 7, 11:16am

The Animas River in southwest Colorado turned bright orange on Wednesday after a mining and safety team working on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spilled a million gallons of mine waste from the abandoned Gold King Mine in San Juan County.

The sediment plume in Durango, Colorado. The river is an important secondary source of water for the city. Photo credit: La Plata County Emergency Management

According to the AP, the team was working with heavy equipment to secure an entrance to mine when they accidentally triggered the large gush that reportedly caused the Cement Creek's water levels to rise two to three feet.

"The project was intended to pump and treat the water and reduce metals pollution flowing out of the mine," EPA spokesman Rich Mylott said in a statement.

San Juan County health officials said that the acidic mine water associated with the release contains high levels of sediment and metals. EPA teams are conducting sampling and visual observations and monitoring river conditions over the next several days.

David Ostrander, director of EPA's emergency response program in Denver, informed the AP there is no threat to drinking water from the spill, however downstream water agencies were warned to avoid Animas water until the plume passes. Ostrander noted that the acidic sludge could irritate the skin.

In a precautionary measure, nearby residents have been warned by local officials to avoid consuming the water as the deluge made its way to La Plata County, Colorado yesterday. In particular, the city of Durango—which uses the river as a secondary source of water during the summer—has been advised to stop pumping raw water from the river, the Durango Herald reported.

Steve Salka, Durango's utilities director, told the publication that residents need to conserve as much water as possible over the next few days until the water is safe to use.

The Animas River has also been temporarily closed to all watercraft and other flotation devices from the north county line (San Juan County, Colorado) to the south county line (at the Colorado/New Mexico State line).

“This decision was made in the interest of public health after consultation with the Environmental Protection Agency, the Colorado Department of Health and Environment, San Juan Basin Health Department and representatives of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe,” advised Sheriff Sean Smith. “This Order shall remain in effect until it is determined that the river is safe. EPA test results of the Animas River are expected within 24-48 hours, and the Order will be re-evaluated at that time.”

As the spill heads down river to New Mexico, officials in the city of Farmington “have shut down water-supply intake pumps to avoid contamination and advised citizens to stay out of the river until the discoloration has passed,” according to the AP.

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Free Speech Radio Network

<http://fsrn.org/2015/08/colorado-mine-spills-at-least-a-million-gallons-of-acidic-waste-water/>

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Colorado mine spills at least a million gallons of acidic waste water

FSRN

August 7, 2015

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A portion of the Animas River that runs through Durango, Colorado was closed this week following a waste water leak at the Gold King Mine above Silverton. At least a million gallons of acidic waste flowed into the river, forcing local officials to warn the public against even physical contact with the water. Hannah Leigh Myers has the story.

Download Audio

By Thursday, high concentrations of iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc and copper had turned the part of the Animas that runs through Durango, Colorado a thick orange color forcing the city to close the river to public use. Irrigation systems were shut off and the city of Durango has stopped pumping water out of the river to protect the water quality in the local reservoir.

Durango is one of Colorado's most popular destinations for rafting, tubing and fly fishing and Buck Skillen, an associate working at Duranglers fly shop, says all river related recreational business is on hold until a solution is found and fly fishermen in particular are waiting to see how the acidic water will affect Animas River fish.

"Our CPW, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, folks have put live cages with small fish in them to judge what the immediate impact tot he fishery is," Skillen said. "And if those fish go belly up they will be tested."

The EPA released a report saying that the spill occurred when an EPA team attempted to access metal contaminated water in the Gold King Mine owned by San Juan Corporation, and determine how best to treat it. The EPA mining and safety team discovered more polluted water than expected leading to the leak. The Animas River is closed indefinitely. The EPA says it's unlikely the ecosystem will be severely damaged, but locals are voicing their doubts and are waiting for the results of multiple water quality tests being conducted by various parties.

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Gizmodo

<http://gizmodo.com/a-acid-spilling-mine-turned-this-colorado-river-bright-1722726719>

An Acid-Spilling Mine Turned This Colorado River Bright Orange

Alissa Walker

August 7, 1:40pm

This time of year kayaks and inner tubes crowd the crystal-clear waters of the Animas River, which flows through the western Colorado city of Durango. Last night, the river was quickly abandoned as one million gallons of wastewater seeping from a local mine slowly trickled downstream, eventually coloring the entire river an eerie electric orange.

The wastewater was accidentally spilled by the Environmental Protection Agency as they attempted cleanup work on Gold King Mine, upstream from Durango. The long-abandoned mine had a collapsed entrance which had been known to release contaminated water into a nearby creek, so a crew of workers was installing a pipe to divert the flow. As they dug a hole they realized the wastewater level in the mine was higher than they thought. A wall of yellow-orange sludge—1,200 gallons per minute—began flowing downstream.

As a ribbon of orange made its way into town yesterday afternoon, the river was closed to recreational use and the city of Durango stopped its intake of water for public consumption. The city's drinking water quality is not at risk, however, since the river is only a secondary source.

The orange color was caused not only by the highly acidic water but also the presence of heavy metals like iron, aluminum, cadmium, zinc, and copper, an EPA worker told the Durango Herald. The dramatic shade made for some stunning and scary images of a river turned toxic.

Testing will begin today to see how fish and other wildlife has been affected, with a mobile lab arriving on-site to determine the chemical makeup of the spill to decide how to treat it. But really the only fix is time: Officials said that the purification of the river will happen naturally as some of the larger solids settle and fresh water flows from upstream.

Check out the before and after shots of the river to see just how much work there is to do.

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PPP Focus

<http://www.pppfocus.com/orange-waste-from-colorado-mine-creeps-toward-new-mexico-16252/>

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Orange waste from Colorado mine creeps toward New Mexico

Andrew Poole

August 7, 2015

The Center for Biological Diversity today blasted the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for downplaying the possibility of impacts to fish and wildlife from a million-gallon spill of toxic mine waste into Cement Creek and the Animas River in southwestern Colorado on Wednesday.

The brook keeps running into the Animas Stream, which then streams into the San Juan Waterway in New Mexico and joins the Colorado Stream in Utah.

Environmental authorities were scrambling Thursday to assess damage from the leak, caused when a plug blew at the Gold King Mine near Silverton.

“When you look at how cloudy and how colored that water is, this was just a royal screw up at a very bad time”, Olsen said.

Test results expected to answer “what’s in the water”; EPA admits it triggered spill.

The EPA said it will be taking samples downstream to confirm the waste has passed and poses no risk to aquatic life or water users over the coming days. “All were unharmed”, the San Juan Basin Health Department said in a news release.

Durango stopped pumping water out of the Animas River on Wednesday to ensure not one of the waste might be sucked up into the town reservoir. “Any kind of recreational activity on the river needs to be suspended”.

The river flows through Durango and into the San Juan River in Farmington, N.M.

Todd Hartman, spokesman for the state's Department of Natural Resources, says the mine operated more than a century ago.

"Its permit was revoked in 2005" , he said.

"It's quite likely fish will be killed", Colorado Parks and Wildlife official Joe Lewandowski, told the station.

The water was about 12 feet high behind the dirt blockage and it likely carries iron and zinc, Griswold said.

Officials say people in the area should avoid contact with the river until further notice.

"It's going to be highly acidic and laden with heavy metals". "We're also monitoring to make sure we don't get infiltration into the hatchery, because that could be a problem". However, any fish alive in the river could face a grim fate.

"This is a significant spill", said Elizabeth Holley, an assistant professor of mining engineering at the Colorado Schools of Mines.